Delhi on November 13-14, 1996.

(c) and (d) The objectives for holding such a Conference are to review the performance of the Department in the preceeding months of the financial year and to deliberate on the strategy to be adopted not only to achieve but also to exceed the action plan targets. The Conference also serves as an experience sharing forum for the top tax administrators of the country.

(d) and (f) The following subjects were discussed in the Conference:—

(i) Review of collection;

(ii) Review of computerisation work with particular emphasis on allotment of Permanent Account Number and Processing of challans;

(iii) Augmentation of infrastructure;

(iv) Widening of tax base;

(v) Suggestions for legislative amendments;

(vi) Review of limited scrutiny scheme; and

(vii) Long term training needs.

On the basis of the suggestions and recommendations made in the Conference, the following major decisions were taken:—

1. The work relating to allotment of Permanent Account Number is to be completed by 31.3.1997 in Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai.

2. For widening the tax base, the following measures were decided:—

   (i) A centralised cell is to be created at Delhi for collecting data in respect of potential tax-payers. This cell will maintain liaison with all Chief Commissioners of Income-tax.

   (ii) Cells on similar lines are to be created in the region of each Chief Commissioner of Income-tax.

   (iii) A study will be made to streamline the existing system of collection of information of potential tax-payers and the utilisation of such information in the Department.

   (iv) A committee was set up to go into the existing procedure regarding tax deduction at source by the banks and to suggest required changes.

3. It was decided that each Chief Commissioner of Income-tax shall identify one project out of their ongoing projects of residential and office accommodation for priority clearance and release of funds.

4. Various suggestions for legislative amendments were noted for examination.

Necessary steps have been taken for speedy implementation of the above decisions.

Passing of Excise/Customs Duty Benefits to Consumers

1186. SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI SUSHIL KUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in most of the cases where excise and customs duty benefits are given under budget proposals by Government every year, the same are not passed down to the consumer in fair proposition;

(b) if so, what is Government's assessment about the extent of such benefits which were passed down to the consumer during 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97 and to what extent the benefits are concerned by the manufacturers, importers and other players in the field; and

(c) what is the mechanism available or contrivance proposed to be put in operation to monitor the passage of such budgetary benefits to the sections whom they are intended to benefit?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) and (b) The prices of commodities are generally determined by market forces and depend on a multiplicity of factors, of which duty of excise or customs is only one. The Government have not made any detailed study of the extent to which the reduction in excise and customs duties offered in the budgets have been passed on to the consumers and to what extent the benefits are concerned by the manufacturers, importers and other players in the field.

(c) There is no legal mechanism to ensure reduction in price to the extent of reduction in duty of excise or customs, where there is no price control and it may not be feasible to enforce the same through legal mechanism.

Quality Control in Blood Banks

1187. SHRI IQBAL SINGH: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of private/Government blood banks functioning at present in the country; and

(b) what steps are being taken by Government to maintain quality control in the blood banks?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI SALEEM IQBAL SHERVANI): (a) As per the information available, there are 499 private blood banks and 834 Government blood banks functioning at present in the country.

(b) For ensuring safety of donated blood, Drugs & Cosmetics Act/Rules provides for mandatory testing of blood for blood transmissible diseases namely Hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, Syphilis and Malaria. The licensing of blood banks has been brought under dual authority of State and Central Government since 1993. The Drugs Controller (India) is now the Central License Approving Authority. A joint inspection of the blood banks is carried out by Central and State Inspectors before approving the license to blood banks.

News-Items Regarding Industrial Slowdown

1188. SHRI SATISH AGARWAL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item captioned "Industrial slowdown is not due to high interest rates, SBI", which appeared in the Times of India of 31st October, 1996;

(b) if so, the real reasons for the slowdown of industrial production; and

(c) the measures proposed to arrest the slowdown?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) During April-July, 1996, industrial production registered a growth rate of 9.3 per cent compared with 12.3 per cent in April-July, 1995. The slow down of Industrial growth during April-July, 1996 is due to poor performance of electricity and mining which recorded a growth rate of 2.5 per cent and 1.8 per cent respectively. Manufacturing sector which countributes 77.4 per cent to industrial production registered a growth rate 11.7 per cent in April-July, 1996 which is almost the same as 11.4 per cent recorded in April-July, 1995. As per growth rate by use-based classification, capital goods (18.6 per cent), intermediate goods, (11.1 per cent) and consumer goods (9.6 per cent also performed well in April-July, 1996. But, the growth rate of basic goods at 4 per cent in April-July, 1996 was below expectation.

(c) A number of policy measures have been announced by the Reserve Bank of India to ensure that genuine productive activities get adequate credit. These